

Watch With Me One Hour

Text: Matthew 26: 40 & 41

"So you had not the strength to keep awake with me one hour? You should be awake and praying not to be put to the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

"So you had not the strength to keep awake one hour? These were the words of Jesus to His disciples in the garden of Gethsemane. This statement shows us the human side of Jesus perhaps better than any other. He had come here to pray, and He asked His three favorite and trusted friends to stay close to Him in His hour of agony. He went off a short distance from them for the privacy of His prayer, yet they must have been within close proximity to Him. He paused in His prayers, much as you and I would pace back and forth when we are sorting something out in our minds; and then He came to His disciples and found them asleep. This caused Him to ask the question, "So you had not the strength to keep awake one hour?" A natural question to ask to be sure. You and I would ask it and perhaps become very angry at our friends for thinking so little of our problem, that they slept while we wrestled with it. But Jesus merely made the observation that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. This is not to say that He did not feel hurt and disappointed. But He probably felt the resignation that what must be done only He could do, and so He went back to His prayer.

The priests in the Temple were counted guilty of sin if they failed to keep watch through the night hours. The sentry on guard duty will be punished if he falls asleep on his post. The disciple should be even more alert to the task at hand and should remain alert to the needs of the one he follows. But being completely human, the men whom Jesus had as disciples were heirs to the weakness of the flesh.

We can look at this example in the story of Christ's passion and we may well ask, "What does this say to us, to our times? Is it relevant today and does it mean anything to me personally?" I think if we consider seriously the implications involved, we can readily see that it speaks to us

right here in our own community. If we hold this example up to the light of day and question its validity in our back yard, we see that we close our eyes and our ears as well to the needs around us. We take a certain pride in our area and this pride too often blinds us to the fact that we have some problems that need taking care of. We say that everything is fine and what is going on elsewhere cannot and does not happen here. We hear talk of drugs and sex, and juvenile delinquency in other areas and say it cannot and will not happen here. And so we close our eyes and drowse, while the hour gets late and sleep on while our master is pleading with us to be alert to the call of service.

We hold special services to give the Christian witness to our community and to make Lent a meaningful period of self examination and self sacrifice and the community goes on its own little way, with only a token response from the participating Christians of the churches. Good Friday is merely another day in which to do business as usual. The stores formerly observed Good Friday, but it is more profitable to remain open all day. Has the observance of the three hours of Good Friday become so passe, that we cannot close down the town to observe it as it should be done? Will the merchants lose that much money in that short a time that they cannot afford to take the time to honor the remembrance of what was done for us? Unfortunately Good Friday has evolved into a Holiday, instead of a Holy Day. The time given off from work is not spent in church or in meditation, but is spent on the golf course and in other pursuits that are more pleasing and less demanding of our souls.

Christ asks us, "So you had not the strength to keep awake with me one hour," in our churches. The call is definitely there and we try to heed it in our mid-week services. But again, what is the response to it? It is only a token amount of support. But we need not feel that we are unique in this, in case we are looking for some sort of consolation. The other areas I have been in are just as apathetic as this one. I think the big hurdle we need to overcome is the one in which we do not care to worship in some ^{ONE} else's church. We

have become more edifice worshippers, than true worshippers of God. We think more of our own little sanctuaries than we do about what worship should be and what it should do for us and our congregations. We are sort of like the two clergymen who were great friends and remained so even though one was a Roman Catholic priest and one was a Protestant minister. They naturally had many talks about the differences of opinion and of differences within the two churches. But they were very close friends, and often talked of this together. One day they were talking together about this and the minister said, "But it is only natural that our friendship should be strong. After all ~~we both teach the same Gospel, we teach the same lessons and strive to~~ we both teach the same lessons and preach the same Gospel, you in your way and I in His." And isn't this the way we go about worshipping together? We forget that we can worship anywhere and it makes no difference where, but how. Jesus Himself taught us that where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them. But too often we think this only applies in our own congregation. We shy away from the other fellow's church as though we were going to become contaminated. But until we as Christians learn to work together, worship together and strive to further the kingdom, we are going to be stumbling blocks to the church of Christ. And I said The church of Christ and I didn't put a denominational tag on it.

You people may wonder sometimes what ministers talk about when they get together. Well, I can tell you that one thing that was mentioned at one of our meetings here, was the validity of continuing the Lenten services. Have we become so sophisticated in our churches that we no longer need to observe Lent? Have our churches accomplished all they can do in this area that we only need open them on Sundays? I think the answers are obvious and we need but look around and we can each answer for ourselves.

Christ asks, "So you had not the strength to keep awake with me one hour?", in our own individual lives. Each Wednesday we have had services and each one I have heard reasons why people are not here. One Wednesday was a very miserable snowy evening, and I heard the few people in church when I

arrived, that not too many would be out and especially not the older folks. Well, when church was over I looked around and was amazed to see that the largest majority were our so called senior citizens. Yes, my friends we can find all kinds of excuses if we so choose. We can say I'm too tired, I had a bad day at the office. But this will not stop us from attending a movie, or attending our club or lodge meeting. We can use the weather, that's always a good excuse. But the weather doesn't stop us from attending sporting events out in much worse weather. We can go bowling, we can do a thousand and one things and never think we are too tired or maybe we shouldn't. But when it comes to going to church we have the excuses. Now I realize my friends that what I am saying is perhaps being said to the wrong ones. At least I have been told this many times before. So I say thank God that you have seen fit to come to church and may He bless you for it. But instead of thinking that one of our friends and neighbors should have been here to hear what was said, let us instead go tell these friends and neighbors tomorrow about Christ seeking them. Let us each make it a point to try to influence some other people in this town to become church going people. I am not talking along denominational lines, I am speaking for all of the churches here. If you and I come to church and never tell outside what goes on inside here, how in the world are we going to ~~make the~~ ^{SPREAD THIS} Gospel spread? You and I are here hearing these things, but many of our neighbors are not. So let's go out of here and tell them that Christ is seeking them to watch with him for some hours in their lives. You don't need to tell them who said it, or what I have said, but just tell them as only you can in your own way.

One of my favorite hymns has a last verse that disturbs me every time I hear it or sing it. The hymn is, "Beneath The Cross of Jesus,"

"I take O cross thy shadow, for my abiding place,
 I ask no other sunshine, than the sunshine of His face.
 Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss,
 My sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross."

Perhaps if we each one committed our lives to the dedication and

ST. PAUL'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
John R. Bucher, pastor

LENT - 1968

THEME - "IT HAPPENED IN CHURCH"

"What happened in church today?" you've been asked. "Anything interesting?"

Perhaps you've never thought of the church as a place for much excitement, but the temple in Jerusalem was certainly an exciting place during the last week of Jesus' life. Jesus spent much of that week there: teaching, conversing, and often getting into arguments. The pastor has chosen our Lenten subjects from among these "church" experiences of Jesus.

The Sunday sermons will be on:
"TALES TOLD IN THE TEMPLE"

The mid-week sermons will be on:
"ARGUMENTS IN THE CHURCH"

We hope these messages will add to your prayerful observance of Lent.

SUNDAY MARCH 3rd - 1st Sunday in Lent
Sermon - "The Two Sons"
Text - Matthew 21:28-32

WEDNESDAY MARCH 6th - 8:00 P.M.
Sermon - "Who Gave You Permission?"
Text - Mark 11:27-33

SUNDAY MARCH 10th - 2nd Sunday in Lent
Sermon - "A Determined Deity"
Text - Matthew 21:33-46

WEDNESDAY MARCH 13th - 8:00 P.M.
Sermon - "Turning the Tables"
Text - Matthew 22:15-22

SUNDAY MARCH 17th - 3rd Sunday in Lent
Sermon - "Must I Go?"
Text - Matthew 22:1-10

WEDNESDAY MARCH 20th - 8:00 P.M.
Sermon - "Getting Close to God"
Text - Mark 12:28-34

SUNDAY MARCH 24th - One Great Hour of Sharing
Sermon by Rev. Robert Stone, Coordinator
for the North Side Christian Ministry

WEDNESDAY MARCH 27th - 8:00 P.M.
Sermon - "Son or Savior?"
Text - Matthew 22:41-46

SUNDAY MARCH 31st - Passion Sunday
Sermon - "Reading Between the Lines"
Text - Matthew 22:29a

WEDNESDAY APRIL 3rd - 8:00 P.M.
Sermon - "Weep for This City"
Text - Matthew 23:37-39

SUNDAY APRIL 7th - Palm Sunday
Sermon - "The Power of God"
Text - Matthew 22:29b

THURSDAY APRIL 11th - COMMUNION SERVICE
Sermon - "All She Had"
Text - Mark 12:41-44

FRIDAY APRIL 12th - GOOD FRIDAY COMMUNION
Sermon - "Which Side Were You On?"
Text - Matthew 23:29-36

SUNDAY APRIL 14th - EASTER SERVICE
Sermon - "On Being an Angel"
Text - Matthew 22:30

